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Department of  
Agriculture

Office of the Chief  
Information Officer

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TO: Agency Chief Information Officers  
Agency Information System Security Program Managers

FROM: Charles R. Christopherson, Jr.  
Chief Financial Officer  
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SUBJECT: Implementation of Thin Client Computing Technology

USDA faces a number of resource and security issues that impact the programs and services USDA provides to our customers. To help alleviate some of these challenges, the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) is expanding its implementation of Thin Client Computing.

#### **What is Thin-Client Computing?**

A thin client is a low-cost, centrally-managed computer devoid of CD-ROM players, diskette drives, and expansion slots. Thin Client Computing is a technology concept which replaces traditional networked personal computers with a "thin" hardware solution on the desktop and places the application software, data, and central processing unit power at the network servers. In general, they are not as vulnerable to malware attacks, have a longer life cycle, use less power and are less expensive to purchase.

#### **The Thin Client Computing Solution Pilot**

OCIO has been evaluating whether Thin Client should be deployed throughout USDA, and, in particular, whether this technological solution can meet the needs of all agencies. A carefully controlled pilot has demonstrated that Thin Client Computing can improve operating efficiencies and provide a means to control many of the security challenges we face. Completed and ongoing projects in this pilot will serve as a model for further expansion of Thin Client Computing to the wider USDA user community and the design of the architecture for a Department Thin Client Solution.

#### **Required Evaluation of the Thin Client Computing Solution**

In order to take full advantage of the Thin Client Computing opportunities, each agency will be required to evaluate the use of Thin Client:

- whenever a new application is being purchased, developed or upgraded;
- for all desktop and laptop purchases;
- for its continuity of operations needs;
- for its traveler needs; and
- for its teleworker needs.

OCIO recognizes that Thin Client cannot replace every workstation within each agency's environment, but OCIO will work with agencies individually to ensure Thin Client computing is effectively implemented. OCIO is establishing a standard desktop image and a common Thin Client environment.

A demonstration of the technology can be provided on request. The Washington Communications and Technology Services (WCTS) Division staff is available to provide more information regarding the evaluation of this technology in your environment. If you have any questions, please contact the WCTS Thin Client Deployment Team at (202) 720-7940.